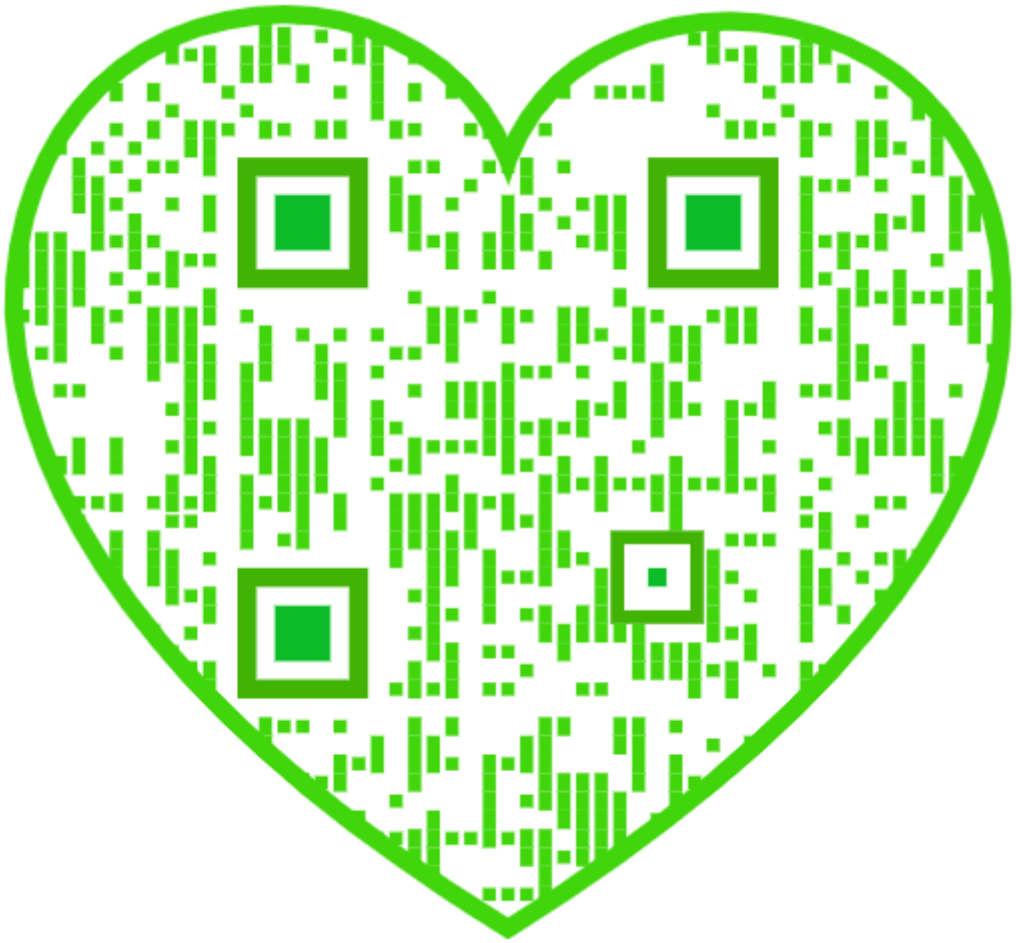
BUYING A HORSE

· William Dean Howells .



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BY

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

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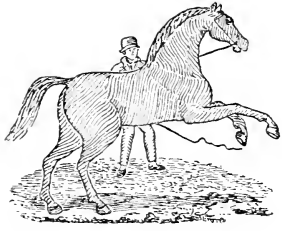


BUYING A HORSE

IF one has money enough, there seems no reason why one should not go and buy such a horse as he wants. This is the commonly accepted theory, on which the whole commerce in horses is founded, and on which my friend proceeded.

He was about removing from Charlesbridge, where he had lived many happy years without a horse, farther into the country, where there were charming drives and inconvenient distances, and where a horse would be very desirable, if not quite necessary. But as a horse seemed at first an extravagant if not sinful desire, he be-

gan by talking vaguely round, and rather hinting than declaring that he thought somewhat of buying. The professor to whom he first intimated his purpose flung himself from his horse's back to the grassy border of the sidewalk where my friend stood, and said he would give him a few points. "In the first place don't buy a horse that shows much daylight under him, unless you buy a horse-doctor *with* him; get a short-legged horse; and he ought to be short and thick in the barrel," — or words to that effect. "Don't get a horse with a narrow forehead: there are horse-fools as well as the other kind, and you want a horse with room for brains. And look out that he 's *all right forward*."

"What 's that?" asked my friend, hearing this phrase for the first time.

"That he is n't tender in his fore-feet, — that the hoof is n't contracted," said the professor, pointing out the well-planted foot of his own animal.

"What ought I to pay for a horse?" pursued my friend, struggling to fix the points given by the professor in a mind hitherto unused to points of the kind.

"Well, horses are cheap, now; and you ought to get a fair family horse — You want a family horse?"

"Yes."

"Something you can ride and drive both? Something your children can drive?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, you ought to get such a horse as that for a hundred and twenty-five dollars."

This was the figure my friend had thought of; he drew a breath of relief. "Where did you buy your horse?"

"Oh, I always get my horses" — the plural abashed my friend — "at the Chevaliers'. If you throw yourself on their mercy, they 'll treat you well. I 'll send you a note to them."

"Do!" cried my friend, as the professor sprang upon his horse, and galloped away.

My friend walked home encouraged; his purpose of buying a horse had not seemed so monstrous, at least to this hardened offender. He now began to announce it more boldly; he said right and left that he wished to buy a horse, but that he would not go above a hundred. This was not true, but he wished to act prudently, and to pay a hundred and twenty-five only in extremity. He carried the professor's note to the Chevaliers', who duly honored it, understood at once what my friend wanted, and said they would look out for him. They were sorry he had not happened in a little sooner, — they had just sold the very horse he wanted. I may as well say here that they were not able to find him a horse, but that they used him with the strictest honor, and that short of supplying his want they were perfect.

In the mean time the irregular dealers began to descend upon him, as well as amateurs to whom he had mentioned his wish for a horse, and his premises at certain hours of the morning presented the effect of a horse-fair, or say rather a museum of equine bricabrac. At first he blushed at the spectacle, but he soon became hardened to it, and liked the excitement of driving one horse after another round the block, and deciding upon him. To a horse, they had none of the qualities commended by the professor, but they had many others which the dealers praised. These persons were not discouraged when he refused to buy, but cheerfully returned the next day with others differently ruinous. They were men of a spirit more obliging than my friend has found in other walks. One of them, who paid him a prefatory visit in his library, in five minutes augmented from six to seven hundred and fifty pounds the weight of a pony-horse,

which he wished to sell. ("What you want," said the Chevaliers, "is a pony-horse," and my friend, gratefully catching at the phrase, had gone about saying he wanted a pony-horse. After that, hulking brutes of from eleven to thirteen hundred pounds were every day brought to him as pony-horses.) The same dealer came another day with a mustang, in whom was no fault, and who had every appearance of speed, but who was only marking time as it is called in military drill, I believe, when he seemed to be getting swiftly over the ground; he showed a sociable preference for the curbstone in turning corners, and was condemned, to be replaced the next evening by a pony-horse that a child might ride or drive, and that especcially would not shy. Upon experiment, he shied half across the road, and the fact was reported to the dealer. He smiled compassionately. "What did he shy *at?*"

"A wheelbarrow."

"Well! I never see the hoss *yet* that *would n't* shy at a wheelbarrow."

My friend owned that a wheelbarrow was of an alarming presence, but he had his reserves respecting the self-control and intelligence of this pony-horse. The dealer amiably withdrew him, and said that he would bring next day a horse — if he could get the owner to part with a family pet — that *would* suit; but upon investigation it appeared that this treasure was what is called a calico-horse, and my friend, who was without the ambition to figure in the popular eye as a stray circus-rider, declined to see him.

These adventurous spirits were not squeamish. They thrust their hands into the lathery mouths of their brutes to show the state of their teeth, and wiped their fingers on their trousers or grass afterwards, without a tremor, though my friend could never forbear a shudder at the sight. If sometimes they came with a desirable

animal, the price was far beyond his modest figure; but generally they seemed to think that he did not want a desirable animal. In most cases, the pony-horse pronounced sentence upon himself by some gross and ridiculous blemish; but sometimes my friend failed to hit upon any tenable excuse for refusing him. In such an event, he would say, with an air of easy and candid comradery, "Well, now, what 's the matter with him?" And then the dealer, passing his hand down one of the pony-horse's fore-legs, would respond, with an upward glance of searching inquiry at my friend, "Well, he 's a leetle mite tender for'a'd."

I am afraid my friend grew to have a cruel pleasure in forcing them to this exposure of the truth; but he excused himself upon the ground that they never expected him to be alarmed at this tenderness forward, and that their truth was not a tribute to virtue, but was contempt of his

ignorance. Nevertheless, it was truth; and he felt that it must be his part thereafter to confute the common belief that there is no truth in horse-trades.

These people were not usually the owners of the horses they brought, but the emissaries or agents of the owners. Often they came merely to show a horse, and were not at all sure that his owner would part with him on any terms, as he was a favorite with the ladies of the family. An impenetrable mystery hung about the owner, through which he sometimes dimly loomed as a gentleman in failing health, who had to give up his daily drives, and had no use for the horse. There were cases in which the dealer came secretly, from pure zeal, to show a horse whose owner supposed him still in the stable, and who must be taken back before his absence was noticed. If my friend insisted upon knowing the owner and conferring with him, in any of these instances, it was

darkly admitted that he was a gentleman in the livery business over in Somerville or down in the Lower Port. Truth, it seemed, might be absent or present in a horse-trade, but mystery was essential.

The dealers had a jargon of their own, in which my friend became an expert. They did not say that a horse weighed a thousand pounds, but ten hundred; he was not worth a hundred and twenty-five dollars, but one and a quarter; he was not going on seven years old, but was coming seven. There are curious facts, by the way, in regard to the age of horses which are not generally known. A horse is never of an even age: that is, he is not six, or eight, or ten, but five, or seven, or nine years old; he is sometimes, but not often, eleven; he is *never* thirteen; his favorite time of life is seven, and he rarely gets beyond it, if on sale. My friend found the number of horses brought into the world in 1871 quite beyond computation.

He also found that most hard-working horses were sick or ailing, as most hard-working men and women are; that perfectly sound horses are as rare as perfectly sound human beings, and are apt, like the latter, to be vicious.

He began to have a quick eye for the characteristics of horses, and could walk round a proffered animal and scan his points with the best. "What," he would ask, of a given beast, "makes him let his lower lip hang down in that imbecile manner?"

"Oh, he's got a parrot-mouth. Some folks like 'em." Here the dealer would pull open the creature's flabby lips, and discover a beak like that of a polyp; and the cleansing process on the grass or trousers would take place.

Of another. "What makes him trot in that spread-out, squatty way, behind?" he demanded, after the usual tour of the block.

"He travels wide. Horse men prefer that."

They preferred any ugliness or awkwardness in a horse to the opposite grace or charm, and all that my friend could urge, in meek withdrawal from negotiation, was that he was not of an educated taste. In the course of long talks, which frequently took the form of warnings, he became wise in the tricks practiced by all dealers except his interlocutor. One of these, a device for restoring youth to an animal nearing the dangerous limit of eleven, struck him as peculiarly ingenious. You pierce the forehead, and blow into it with a quill; this gives an agreeable fullness, and erects the drooping ears in a spirited and mettlesome manner, so that a horse coming eleven will look for a time as if he were coming five.

After a thorough course of the volunteer dealers, and after haunting the Chevaliers' stables for several weeks, my friend found

that not money alone was needed to buy a horse. The affair began to wear a sinister aspect. He had an uneasy fear that in several cases he had refused the very horse he wanted with the *aplomb* he had acquired in dismissing undesirable beasts. The fact was he knew less about horses than when he began to buy, while he had indefinitely enlarged his idle knowledge of men, of their fatuity and hollowness. He learned that men whom he had always envied their brilliant omniscience in regard to horses, as they drove him out behind their dashing trotters, were quite ignorant and helpless in the art of buying; they always got somebody else to buy their horses for them. "Find a man you can trust," they said, "and then put yourself in his hands. And *never* trust anybody about the health of a horse. Take him to a veterinary surgeon, and have him go all over him."

My friend grew sardonic; then he grew melancholy and haggard. There was some-

thing very strange in the fact that a person unattainted of crime, and not morally disabled in any known way, could not take his money and buy such a horse as he wanted with it. His acquaintance began to recommend men to him. "If you want a horse, Captain Jenks is your man." "Why don't you go to Major Snaffle? He 'd take pleasure in it." But my friend, naturally reluctant to trouble others, and sickened by long failure, as well as maddened by the absurdity that if you wanted a horse you must first get a man, neglected this really good advice. He lost his interest in the business, and dismissed with lack-lustre indifference the horses which continued to be brought to his gate. He felt that his position before the community was becoming notorious and ridiculous. He slept badly; his long endeavor for a horse ended in nightmares.

One day he said to a gentleman whose turn-out he had long admired, "I wonder if you could n't find me a horse!"

"Want a horse?"

"Want a horse! I thought my need was known beyond the sun. I thought my want of a horse was branded on my forehead."

This gentleman laughed, and then he said, "I 've just seen a mare that would suit you. I thought of buying her, but I want a match, and this mare is too small. She 'll be round here in fifteen minutes, and I 'll take you out with her. Can you wait?"

"Wait!" My friend laughed in his turn.

The mare dashed up before the fifteen minutes had passed. She was beautiful, black as a coal; and kind as a kitten, said her driver. My friend thought her head was rather big. "Why, yes, she 's a *pony*-horse; that 's what I like about her."

She trotted off wonderfully, and my friend felt that the thing was now done.

The gentleman, who was driving, laid

his head on one side, and listened. "Clicks, don't she?"

"She *does* click," said my friend obligingly.

"Hear it?" asked the gentleman.

"Well, if you ask me," said my friend, "I *don't* hear it. What *is* clicking?"

"Oh, striking the heel of her fore-foot with the toe of her hind-foot. Sometimes it comes from bad shoeing. Some people like it. I don't myself." After a while he added, "If you can get this mare for a hundred and twenty-five, you 'd better buy her."

"Well, I will," said my friend. He would have bought her, in fact, if she had clicked like a noiseless sewing-machine. But the owner, remote as Medford, and invisibly dealing, as usual, through a third person, would not sell her for one and a quarter; he wanted one and a half. Besides, another Party was trying to get her; and now ensued a negotiation which for

intricacy and mystery surpassed all the others. It was conducted in my friend's interest by one who had the difficult task of keeping the owner's imagination in check and his demands within bounds, for it soon appeared that he wanted even more than one and a half for her. Unseen and inaccessible, he grew every day more unmanageable. He entered into relations with the other Party, and it all ended in his sending her out one day after my friend had gone into the country, and requiring him to say at once that he would give one and a half. He was not at home, and he never saw the little mare again. This confirmed him in the belief that she was the very horse he ought to have had.

People had now begun to say to him, "Why don't you advertise? Advertise for a gentleman's pony-horse and phaeton and harness complete. You 'll have a perfect procession of them before night." This proved true. His advertisement, mystically

worded after the fashion of those things, found abundant response. But the establishments which he would have taken he could not get at the figure he had set, and those which his money would buy he would not have. They came at all hours of the day; and he never returned home after an an absence without meeting the reproach that *now* the very horse he wanted had just been driven away, and would not be brought back, as his owner lived in Billerica, and only happened to be down. A few equipages really appeared desirable, but in regard to these his jaded faculties refused to work: he could decide nothing; his volition was extinct; he let them come and go.

It was at this period that people who had at first been surprised that he wished to buy a horse came to believe that he had bought one, and were astonished to learn that he had not. He felt the pressure of public opinion.

He began to haunt the different sale-stables in town, and to look at horses with a view to buying at private sale. Every facility for testing them was offered him, but he could not make up his mind. In feeble wantonness he gave appointments which he knew he should not keep, and, passing his days in an agony of multitudinous indecision, he added to the lies in the world the hideous sum of his broken engagements. From time to time he forlornly appeared at the Chevaliers', and refreshed his corrupted nature by contact with their sterling integrity. Once he ventured into their establishment just before an auction began, and remained dazzled by the splendor of a spectacle which I fancy can be paralleled only by some dream of a mediæval tournament. The horses, brilliantly harnessed, accurately shod, and standing tall on burnished hooves, their necks curved by the check rein and their black and blonde manes flowing over the proud arch, lustrous

and wrinkled like satin, were ranged in a glittering hemicycle. They affected my friend like the youth and beauty of his earliest evening parties; he experienced a sense of bashfulness, of sickening personal demerit. He could not have had the audacity to bid on one of those superb creatures, if all the Chevaliers together had whispered him that here at last was the very horse.

I pass over an unprofitable interval in which he abandoned himself to despair, and really gave up the hope of being able ever to buy a horse. During this interval he removed from Charlesbridge to the country, and found himself, to his self-scorn and self-pity, actually reduced to hiring a livery horse by the day. But relief was at hand. The carpenter who had remained to finish up the new house after my friend had gone into it bethought himself of a firm in his place who brought on horses from the West, and had the practice of selling a

horse on trial, and constantly replacing it with other horses till the purchaser was suited. This seemed an ideal arrangement, and the carpenter said that he *thought* they had the very horse my friend wanted.

The next day he drove him up, and upon the plan of successive exchanges till the perfect horse was reached, my friend bought him for one and a quarter, the figure which he had kept in mind from the first. He bought a phaeton and harness from the same people, and when the whole equipage stood at his door, he felt the long-delayed thrill of pride and satisfaction. The horse was of the Morgan breed, a bright bay, small and round and neat, with a little head tossed high, and a gentle yet alert movement. He was in the prime of youth, of the age of which every horse desires to be, and was just coming seven. My friend had already taken him to a horse-doctor, who for one dollar had gone all over him, and pronounced him sound as

a fish, and complimented his new owner upon his acquisition. It all seemed too good to be true. As Billy turned his soft eye on the admiring family group, and suffered one of the children to smooth his nose while another held a lump of sugar to his dainty lips, his amiable behavior restored my friend to his peace of mind and his long-lost faith in a world of reason.

The ridiculous planet, wavering bat-like through space, on which it had been impossible for an innocent man to buy a suitable horse was a dream of the past, and he had the solid, sensible old earth under his feet once more. He mounted into the phaeton and drove off with his wife; he returned and gave each of the children a drive in succession. He told them that any of them could drive Billy as much as they liked, and he quieted a clamor for exclusive ownership on the part of each by declaring that Billy belonged to the whole family. To this day he cannot look back

to those moments without tenderness. If Billy had any apparent fault, it was an amiable indolence. But this made him all the safer for the children, and it did not really amount to laziness. While on sale he had been driven in a provision cart, and had therefore the habit of standing unhitched. One had merely to fling the reins into the bottom of the phaeton and leave Billy to his own custody. His other habit of drawing up at kitchen gates was not confirmed, and the fact that he stumbled on his way to the doctor who pronounced him blameless was reasonably attributed to a loose stone at the foot of the hill; the misstep resulted in a barked shin, but a little wheel-grease, in a horse of Billy's complexion, easily removed the evidence of this.

It was natural that after Billy was bought and paid for, several extremely desirable horses should be offered to my friend by their owners, who came in person,

stripped of all the adventitious mystery of agents and middle-men. They were gentlemen, and they spoke the English habitual with persons not corrupted by horses. My friend saw them come and go with grief; for he did not like to be shaken in his belief that Billy was the only horse in the world for him, and he would have liked to purchase their animals, if only to show his appreciation of honor and frankness and sane language. Yet he was consoled by the possession of Billy, whom he found increasingly excellent and trustworthy. Any of the family drove him about; he stood unhitched; he was not afraid of cars; he was as kind as a kitten; he had not, as the neighboring coachman said, a voice, though he seemed a little loively in coming out of the stable sometimes. He went well under the saddle; he was a beauty, and if he had a voice, it was too great satisfaction in his personal appearance.

One evening after tea, the young gentle-

man, who was about to drive Billy out, stung by the reflection that he had not taken blackberries and cream twice, ran into the house to repair the omission, and left Billy, as usual, unhitched at the door. During his absence, Billy caught sight of his stable, and involuntarily moved towards it. Finding himself unchecked, he gently increased his pace; and when my friend, looking up from the melon-patch which he was admiring, called out, "Ho, Billy! Whoa, Billy!" and headed him off from the gap, Billy profited by the circumstance to turn into the pear orchard. The elastic turf under his unguided hoof seemed to exhilarate him; his pace became a trot, a canter, a gallop, a tornado; the reins fluttered like ribbons in the air; the phaeton flew ruining after. In a terrible cyclone the equipage swept round the neighbor's house, vanished, reappeared, swooped down his lawn, and vanished again. It was incredible.

My friend stood transfixed among his melons. He knew that his neighbor's children played under the porte-cochère on the other side of the house which Billy had just surrounded in his flight, and probably . . . . My friend's first impulse was not to go and see, but to walk into his own house, and ignore the whole affair. But you cannot really ignore an affair of that kind. You must face it, and commonly it stares you out of countenance. Commonly, too, it knows how to choose its time so as to disgrace as well as crush its victim. His neighbor had people to tea, and long before my friend reached the house the host and his guests were all out on the lawn, having taken the precaution to bring their napkins with them.

"The children!" gasped my friend.

"Oh, they were all in bed," said the neighbor, and he began to laugh. That was right; my friend would have mocked at the calamity if it had been his neigh-

bor's. "Let us go and look up your phaeton." He put his hand on the naked flank of a fine young elm, from which the bark had just been stripped. "Billy seems to have passed this way."

At the foot of a stone-wall four feet high lay the phaeton, with three wheels in the air, and the fourth crushed flat against the axle; the willow back was broken, the shafts were pulled out, and Billy was gone.

"Good thing there was nobody in it," said the neighbor.

"Good thing it did n't run down some Irish family, and get you in for damages," said a guest.

It appeared, then, that there were two good things about this disaster. My friend had not thought there were so many, but while he rejoiced in this fact, he rebelled at the notion that a sorrow like that rendered the sufferer in any event liable for damages, and he resolved that he never

would have paid them. But probably he would.

Some half-grown boys got the phaeton right-side up, and restored its shafts and cushions, and it limped away with them towards the carriage-house. Presently another half-grown boy came riding Billy up the hill. Billy showed an inflated nostril and an excited eye, but physically he was unharmed, save for a slight scratch on what was described as the off hind-leg; the reader may choose which leg this was.

"The worst of it is," said the guest, "that you never can trust 'em after they 've run off once."

"Have some tea?" said the host to my friend.

"No, thank you," said my friend, in whose heart the worst of it rankled; and he walked home embittered by his guilty consciousness that Billy ought never to have been left untied. But it was not this self-reproach; it was not the muti-

lated phaeton; it was not the loss of Billy, who must now be sold; it was the wreck of settled hopes, the renewed suspense of faith, the repetition of the tragical farce of buying another horse, that most grieved my friend.

Billy's former owners made a feint of supplying other horses in his place, but the only horse supplied was an aged veteran with the scratches, who must have come seven early in our era, and who, from his habit of getting about on tiptoe, must have been tender for'a'd beyond anything of my friend's previous experience. Probably if he could have waited they might have replaced Billy in time, but their next installment from the West produced nothing suited to his wants but a horse with the presence and carriage of a pig, and he preferred to let them sell Billy for what he would bring, and to trust his fate elsewhere. Billy had fallen nearly one half in value, and he brought

very little — to his owner; though the new purchaser was afterwards reported to value him at much more than what my friend had paid for him. These things are really mysteries; you cannot fathom them; it is idle to try. My friend remained grieving over his own folly and carelessness, with a fond hankering for the poor little horse he had lost, and the belief that he should never find such another. Yet he was not without a philanthropist's consolation. He had added to the stock of harmless pleasures in a degree of which he could not have dreamed. All his acquaintance knew that he had bought a horse, and they all seemed now to conspire in asking him how he got on with it. He was forced to confess the truth. On hearing it, his friends burst into shouts of laughter, and smote their persons, and stayed themselves against lamp-posts and house-walls. They begged his pardon, and then they began again,

and shouted and roared anew. Since the gale which blew down the poet ——'s chimneys and put him to the expense of rebuilding them, no joke so generally satisfactory had been offered to the community. My friend had, in his time, achieved the reputation of a wit by going about and and saying, "Did you know ——'s chimneys had blown down?" and he had now himself the pleasure of causing the like quality of wit in others.

Having abandoned the hope of getting anything out of the people who had sold him Billy, he was for a time the prey of an inert despair, in which he had not even spirit to repine at the disorder of a universe in which he could not find a horse. No horses were now offered to him, for it had become known throughout the trade that he had bought a horse. He had therefore to set about counteracting this impression with what feeble powers were left him. Of the facts of that period he

remembers with confusion and remorse the trouble to which he put the owner of the pony-horse Pansy, whom he visited repeatedly in a neighboring town, at a loss of time and money to himself, and with no result but to embarrass Pansy's owner in his relations with people who had hired him and did not wish him sold. Something of the old baffling mystery hung over Pansy's whereabouts; he was with difficulty produced, and when *en evidence* he was not the Pansy my friend had expected. He paltered with his regrets; he covered his disappointment with what pretenses ha could; and he waited till he could telegraph back his adverse decision. His conclusion was that, next to proposing marriage, there was no transaction of life that involved so many delicate and complex relations as buying a horse, and that the rupture of a horse-trade was little less embarrassing and distressing to all concerned than a broken engagement. There was a

terrible intimacy in the affair; it was alarmingly personal. He went about sorrowing for the pain and disappointment he had inflicted on many amiable people of all degrees who had tried to supply him with a horse.

"Look here," said his neighbor, finding him in this low state, "why don't you get a horse of the gentleman who furnishes mine?" This had been suggested before, and my friend explained that he had disliked to make trouble. His scruples were lightly set aside, and he suffered himself to be entreated. The fact was he was so discouraged with his attempt to buy a horse that if any one had now given him such a horse as he wanted he would have taken it.

One sunny, breezy morning his neighbor drove my friend over to the beautiful farm of the good genius on whose kindly offices he had now fixed his languid hopes. I need not say what the landscape was in mid-August, or how, as they drew near the

farm, the air was enriched with the breath of vast orchards of early apples, — apples that no forced fingers rude shatter from their stems, but that ripen and mellow untouched, till they drop into the straw with which the orchard aisles are bedded; it is the poetry of horticulture; it is Art practicing the wise and gracious patience of Nature, and offering to the Market a Summer Sweeting of the Hesperides.

The possessor of this luscious realm at once took my friend's case into consideration; he listened, the owner of a hundred horses, with gentle indulgence to the shapeless desires of a man whose wildest dream was *one* horse. At the end he said, "I see you want a horse that can take care of himself."

"No," replied my friend, with the inspiration of despair. "I want a horse that can take care of me."

The good genius laughed, and turned the conversation. Neither he nor my

friend's neighbor was a man of many words, and like taciturn people they talked in low tones. The three moved about the room and looked at the Hispano-Roman pictures; they had a glass of sherry; from time to time something was casually murmured about Frank. My friend felt that he was in good hands, and left the affair to them. It ended in a visit to the stable, where it appeared that this gentleman had no horse to sell among his hundred which exactly met my friend's want, but that he proposed to lend him Frank while a certain other animal was put in training for the difficult office he required of a horse. One of the men was sent for Frank, and in the mean time my friend was shown some gaunt and graceful thoroughbreds, and taught to see the difference between them and the plebeian horse. But Frank, though no thoroughbred, eclipsed these patricians when he came. He had a little head, and a neck gallantly

arched; he was black and plump and smooth, and though he carried himself with a petted air, and was a dandy to the tips of his hooves, his knowing eye was kindly. He turned it upon my friend with the effect of understanding *his* case at a glance.

It was in this way that for the rest of the long, lovely summer peace was re-established in his heart. There was no question of buying or selling Frank; there were associations that endeared him beyond money to his owner; but my friend could take him without price. The situation had its humiliation for a man who had been arrogantly trying to buy a horse, but he submitted with grateful meekness, and with what grace Heaven granted him; and Frank gayly entered upon the peculiar duties of his position. His first duty was to upset all preconceived notions of the advantage of youth in a horse. Frank was not merely not coming seven or nine,

but his age was an even number, — he was sixteen; and it was his owner's theory, which Frank supported, that if a horse was well used he was a good horse till twenty-five.

The truth is that Frank looked like a young horse; he was a dandy without any of the ghastliness which attends the preservation of youth in old beaux of another species. When my friend drove him in the rehabilitated phaeton he felt that the turn-out was stylish, and he learned to consult certain eccentricities of Frank's in the satisfaction of his pride. One of these was a high reluctance to be passed on the road. Frank was as lazy a horse — but lazy in a self-respectful, æsthetic way — as ever was; yet if he heard a vehicle at no matter how great distance behind him (and he always heard it before his driver), he brightened with resolution and defiance, and struck out with speed that made competition difficult. If my friend found that

the horse behind was likely to pass Frank, he made a merit of holding him in. If they met a team, he lay back in his phaeton, and affected not to care to be going faster than a walk, any way.

One of the things for which he chiefly prized Frank was his skill in backing and turning. He is one of those men who become greatly perturbed when required to back and turn a vehicle; he cannot tell (till too late) whether he ought to pull the right rein in order to back to the left, or *vice versa;* he knows, indeed, the principle, but he becomes paralyzed in its application. Frank never was embarrassed, never confused. My friend had but to say, "Back, Frank!" and Frank knew from the nature of the ground how far to back and which way to turn. He has thus extricated my friend from positions in which it appeared to him that no earthly power could relieve him.

In going up hill Frank knew just when

to give himself a rest, and at what moment to join the party in looking about and enjoying the prospect. He was also an adept in scratching off flies, and had a precision in reaching an insect anywhere in his van with one of his rear hooves which few of us attain in slapping mosquitoes. This action sometimes disquieted persons in the phaeton, but Frank knew perfectly well what he was about, and if harm had happened to the people under his charge my friend was sure that Frank could have done anything short of applying arnica and telegraphing to their friends. His varied knowledge of life and his long experience had satisfied him that there were very few things to be afraid of in this world. Such womanish weaknesses as shying and starting were far from him, and he regarded the boisterous behavior of locomotives with indifference. He had not, indeed, the virtue of one horse offered to my friend's purchase, of standing, unmoved,

with his nose against a passing express train; but he was certainly not afraid of the cars.

Frank was by no means what Mr. Emerson calls a mush of concession; he was not merely amiable; he had his moments of self-assertion, his touches of asperity. It was not safe to pat his nose, like the erring Billy's; he was apt to bring his handsome teeth together in proximity to the caressing hand with a sharp click and a sarcastic grin. Not that he ever did, or ever would really bite. So, too, when left to stand long under fly-haunted cover, he he would start off afterwards with alarming vehemence; and he objected to the saddle. On the only occasion when any of my friend's family mounted him, he trotted gayly over the grass towards the house, with the young gentleman on his back; then, without warning, he stopped short, a slight tremor appeared to pass over him, and his rider continued the ex-

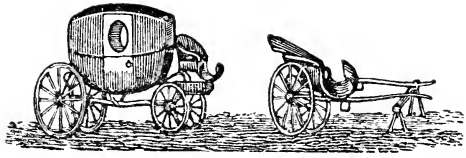
cursion some ten feet farther, alighting lump-wise on a bunch of soft turf which Frank had selected for his reception.

The summer passed, and in the comfort of Frank's possession my friend had almost abandoned the idea of ever returning him to his owner. He had thoughts of making the loan permanent, as something on the whole preferable to a purchase. The drives continued quite into December, over roads as smooth and hard as any in June, and the air was delicious. The first snow brought the suggestion of sleighing; but that cold weather about Christmas dispersed these gay thoughts, and restored my friend to virtue. Word came from the stable that Frank's legs were swelling from standing so long without going out, and my friend resolved to part with an animal for which he had no use. I do not praise him for this; it was no more than his duty; but I record his action in order to account for the fact that he is again

without a horse, and now, with the opening of the fine weather, is beginning once more to think of buying one.

But he is in no mood of arrogant confidence. He has satisfied himself that neither love nor money is alone adequate to the acquisition: the fates also must favor it. The horse which Frank's owner has had in training may or may not be just the horse he wants. He does not know; he humbly waits; and he trembles at the alternative of horses, mystically summoned from space, and multitudinously advancing upon him, parrot-mouthed, pony-gaited, tender for'a'd, and traveling wide behind.

[FINIS]



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